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ABSTRACT

During the past ten years, a series of small studies have been conducted at Memorial University of Newfoundland (Canada) to examine the influence of varying the length of the student teaching practicum on the self-concept of teachers and their motivation towards the profession. Measures of self-concept and motivation have been taken by student teachers during four different lengths of practica in three different locations. Practicum lengths ranged from 3 to 13 weeks, with student teachers also varying in the amount of prior experience and training before attending the practicum. Research so far indicates that the notion that the longer the student teacher practicum the better may not be true. While it is not yet clear what the optimum practicum length should be, it does appear that the governing factor might be the minimum time required to develop technical competence and self-confidence rather than the period of time required to fully socialize a student into a teacher. (CB)

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THE EXTENDED PRACTICUM: MORE OF THE SAME

by

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Introduction

The student teaching component of the teacher education program is an interesting example of the theory-practice relationship. The object of this experiential part of the program is to put into practice those understandings that have been developed as a result of learning about educational theory. While this is a universal aspect of teacher education in Canada the attendant problems are numerous and not well understood. One of the issues often raised when discussing student teaching is the nature of the activity itself. Most persons agree that the experience should be progressive and not merely include more of the same, but what this means is unclear and this paper will provide one possible avenue for exploring improvement to the practicum.

During the past ten years a series of small studies have been conducted at Memorial to examine only one aspect of one part of the very complex notion of student teaching. In its simplest terms the investigation has centered on the influence of varying the length of the student teaching practicum on the self-concept of teachers and their motivation towards the profession.

Teachers as Professionals

Through much of the twentieth century teachers have claimed professional stature and have fought hard to deserve

the status and prestige associated with that title as it has been applied to the four traditional professions; medicine, law, the clergy and the military. Teachers have achieved only a limited amount of success in this endeavor and there is great concern that the hard won professional gains made in the recent past may be eroded even further because of the bad press that teachers have received in relation to union activities and student achievement levels.

Generally teachers patterning themselves after the traditional professions must meet criteria established in two general areas. In order to be considered a professional an individual must possess a very high level of theoretical understanding of the professional field and be technically proficient in performing the skills necessary to perform this essential service to the society. These two cognitive accomplishments foster the granting of the highest amount of autonomy awarded to any occupational group. Professionals observe this high level of autonomy because they know better than anyone else the intricacies of their vocation. Therefore no one else can make a valid judgment about this proficiency in fulfilling these professional tasks. Because of this virtual monopoly of knowledge and the importance of their function to the maintenance of society, professionals must adhere to a strict code of ethics that will prevent them from taking advantage of their clients who have no knowledge. Professionals must be imbued with this notion of commitment so that they will fulfill their professional obligation without ulterior motives. Where teacher dedication was

seldom questioned during the long struggle occupying the first few decades of the twentieth century, many now claim that teacher commitment decreased as wages increased. It is clear that teachers have concentrated on monetary issues in the recent past and the accountibility movement has tended to emphasize the cognitive rather than the affective competencies of teachers. But it will be argued here that the professional teacher must possess a large amount of both aspects in order to pursue career goals that will provide adequate monetary and psychic rewards. This paper will claim that the professional predispositions that cause teachers to behave professionally in their treatment of students is equally as important as possessing the adequate knowledge and skills that promote learning. Teaching is a difficult job and those who preserve for twenty years should possess the attitudes and motivations that encourage excellence in themselves and their students.

The Theory Practice Relationship of Occupations

There are different practical experiences associated with each of the different kinds of occupational training programs. Certain vocational programs have work-study components that provide some kind of minimal work experience which can be combined with some academic courses which will be used to learn the desired vocational tasks. Often it is assumed that the bulk of the learning will come from on-the-job training which requires mainly experiencial learning rather

than a firm grasp of theoretical concepts. This kind of pre-employment training has the lowest theoretical content and the shortest practical training period. Vocational schools often provide this kind of training for such jobs as auto mechanics, supermarket employees or beauticians and bankers. The skills needed are relatively low level and meant to be developed by on the job experience.

A second category of occupations might be crafts and trades. The theory-practice relationship is more pronounced with virtually all of the skills being learned through experience. An apprenticeship is generally associated with arts and crafts or with learning a trade such as an electrician or a plumber. Aspirants learning these important activities typically undergo years of closely supervised practical experience because learning comes mainly from experience where trial and error leads to an adequate understanding of the manipulation of things. An apprenticeship program is long and arduous because there is an attempt to provide a complete array of practical experiences enabling the apprentice to encounter all of the problems that might occur during the coming career. Rex (1968) makes the point this way when trying to demonstrate the inappropriateness of an apprentice-ship for teachers.

> An apprentice can learn all he needs to know about his chosen trade or draft by spending an appropriate amount of time progressing through the various stages of "how to do" the job. Through

> this experience he ultimately moves from the position of novice to the position of craftsman. Apprenticeship is, therefore, an appropriate means for training in the semiskilled and skilled trades. It is not an appropriate method for training professionals. (p. 11)

An apprenticeship is inappropriate for teachers because it deals with things rather than persons and it assumes that the necessary skills and understandings can be learned on the job through practical experience.

It might be argued that because university professors receive no pedagogical training they are forced to serve an apprenticeship period in order to learn from experience how to teach. Many of us have experienced the results of this unfortunate system. Often the university professor has had an initial experience as a laboratory instructor or a junior lecturer during the graduate program. On the way to a Ph.D. in some specialized area a professional candidate might earn his way by apprenticing for four to six years. This lengthy practical training typically follows four years of undergraduate work and ideally is conducted by a senior faculty member interested in the education of promising talent into the professoriate. This pattern is not followed by the traditional professions nor by the bulk of the teacher education institutions in Canada.

A third occupational category, that of technicians, has often been associated with teachers. Technicians tend to multiply in post-modern societies and their high level of skills and expertise are important to the ongoing nature of the society.

Technicians master several rather standard techniques and apply them more or less routinely to their task. This is not meant to imply that their tasks are simple or lacking in a theoretical basis. The problem for technicians is one of autonomy however because even though they perform complex tasks with great skill their results are forwarded elsewhere for interpretation. For example, an X-ray technician is a highly skilled individual dealing with matters of life and death daily; but there are set procedures that are applied routinely in a host of cases, and diagnosis is not made by these technicians but rather by professionals.

Teachers do not fit this description of a technician nor do they reside comfortably among the crafts or trades. Problems which arise in any classroom do not lend themselves to a standard set of solutions. The teaching situation is closer to that of a doctor who has to diagnose, evaluate, prescribe, and re-evaluate in order to properly treat the client. However, while doctors can send their patients home to mend or die, teachers are in a situation requiring constant decision making. Teachers stalled at the craft or technical level have little hope of becoming more professional by improving their expertise through perfecting mere skills and techniques by practice.

Housam et al. (1976) make the point this way.

> Though teachers often may not be as aware of their role and its significance as they might be, they are involved in continuous decision making. Every moment has its uniqueness; every situation is in some ways different from every other. There is no index of craft-like answers available in a professional cookbook or manual. Teachers must draw upon what they have in professional insights and intervention strategies in order to decide how to help children learn. (p. 11)

It is ironic that teachers often lament this situation claiming that there are no agreed upon standard methods or techniques for dealing with specific situations, when this is one of their basic claims to professional status. It would appear, therefore, that work-study programs, apprenticeships and on-the-job training are all inappropriate ways for teachers to gain practical experience because first of all they deal with things rather than people and perhaps more importantly because there is an assumption that the necessary skills and understandings can be learned through practical experience.

The fourth category of occupations to be mentioned is the professionals. Professionals generally argue that it is not possible for them to learn only from experience because they deal with the human condition and therefore can never experience all of the complex combinations that might arise in their treatment of any one individual case. The learn-by-experience apprenticeship is of much less use to them because they must be able to diagnose situations by the application of theoretical understandings and not the mere exercise of practical experience. Therefore professionals utilize a shorter, more highly structured period of practical experience

than an apprenticeship but insist on a long theoretical program which will provide them with diagnostic skills enabling them to more accurately solve the varied human situations.

If the traditional professional model emphasizes the enlarged theoretical component as well as a structured practical experience then teaching should seriously consider the internship program as proposed by Rex (1968).

> ...the intern, who aspires to ultimate professional practice, must have accumulated a body of substantive knowledge, must have acquired specific skills, and must have developed at least a degree of technique before he is even considered eligible to function in the internship. There is, in effect, an identifiable plan and period of preparation for an internship. (p. 18)

Housam et al. (1976) underlines the theoretical component of teacher education this way.

> Professions cannot exist without an undergirding science. To fail to develop principles, concepts, and theories, and to validate practice is to restrict the occupation to the level of a craft.
>
> The undergirding disciplines of teaching are relatively easy to identify; psychology, sociology, anthropology, and philosophy are most central. (p. 11)

Therefore it seems as though the professionalization of teachers needs to have a strong theoretical component in addition to a highly structured period of practical experience.

In addition to these rather basic concerns there is the question of how long it takes to socialize a person from the role of a student to that of a teacher. As was indicated

above, trades and crafts often require a lengthy period of apprenticeship to take on the mantel of their chosen occupation. A prolonged period is also required for university professors who may work for six to ten years taking a higher program in their area of specialization. Doctors and lawyers have cut the socialization process down to three years of concentrated study in some instances, but if the undergraduate prerequisites are counted, a five or six year program is often used to socialize a student into being a professional. Of the four traditional professions only the military has managed to shorten its period of socialization to approximate that of a teacher. Perhaps many student teachers see their practicum as similar to the boot-camp experience of the armed forces.

Professional Predispositions

In discussing both the theory-practice relationship and the socialization aspects of teacher education it is necessary to consider what constitutes an appropriate goal. If it is suggested that teachers should behave in a professional manner then there must be some intent to differentiate professional behavior from that of other occupational groupings. In addition to a prolonged period of theoretical preparation and a modicum of practical experience, professionals traditionally claim to have a strong commitment to their clients that revolves around the

notion that the service should be performed without ulterior motives. Quite clearly, teachers are engaged in performing many technical functions in an endeavor to promote learning in their students. However, in addition to teaching the 3R's, professional teachers are expected to act in a manner that exhibits ethical behavior to their students. To the extent that teachers are able to convey this notion of professional commitment they will be successful in making a vital distinction between technicians and professionals.

It has been argued elsewhere that these motivations and attitudes to behave ethically are equally important to the development of sound teaching methods and techniques, and that there are certain predispositions to act professionally that exist and must be developed in the preparation of teachers for their career.

There are certain professional predispositions to act which must be possessed by all teachers who claim the title of professional. These professional predispositions must be developed during the professional education program which is why the socialization for professionals is so long and carefully planned to move the individual from the role of a student to the role of a practicing professional. The theory-practice relationship must be carefully integrated and the socialization process engineered in such a way as to introduce the student gradually into the professional situation. This process is given careful attention in the traditional professions even after there has been a careful

screening of candidates in an attempt to eliminate individuals who might not possess these professional predispositions. The traditional professions realize that even though there may be individuals who are more prone to possessing the appropriate professional predispositions, these candidates need further guidance in order to develop these important characteristics to the utmost. Part of the criteria necessary for the selection of professional candidates into the education program would require that the selection committee assess accurately the inherent personal characteristics that will most likely promote professional predispositions. Quite clearly this is a very difficult task which assumes that these professional predispositions can be identified and are inherited. Even if this is true, the traditional professions typically require at least three years to develop these attitudinal skills to a level that might be acceptable to a practicing professional.

Therefore the teacher education program in Canadian institutions has taken on a huge task in the professionalization of teachers. Student teachers must understand the theoretical underpinnings of educational practice, they must develop pedagogical skills and techniques that will transform their knowledge into information that can be readily understood by students much younger than themselves, and in addition they must acquire the attitudes and values that will sustain them in the pursuit of a professional career. It is little wonder that with all of these things going on the practical exercise

of these talents has not been given much time in the overall teacher education program. The question of the length of the student teaching component of the program looms very large given these circumstances, and the ability of the practicum to foster professional attitudes and values should be of prime concern. While the mastery of content material and the methods and techniques needed to educationally package this information must be pursued, it is proposed that the development of professional predispositions as important if not more important than these cognitive aspects in the education of teachers.

The Length of Practicum

From the above it can be seen that teachers represent an interesting occupational example of the theory-practice relationship. They claim professional status even though the amount of time spent gaining practical experience is closer to that of a vocational work-study program than either a professional internship or a trade or craftsperson apprenticeship. This is an unfortunate situation because teachers are required to combine a high level of technical competence with the strong professional commitment that is typically associated with the traditional professionals.

While teacher education has typically adopted a bias against being a technician and in Canada there is also a practical obstacle. Traditionally, Canadian teacher education

programs have been required to generate large numbers of teachers in short periods of time in order to meet the crisis situations in the schools. Therefore even though there is no longer a shortage situation, there is no province in Canada where a prospective high school teacher need spend more than one year of pedagogical preparation in order to enter the teaching profession. This single academic year must include the foundational understandings, the pedagogical skills and techniques as well as the practical experience required to certify the teacher as professional. It would be quite possible for a Canadian teacher education institution to devote half of its entire program to student teaching and still require less than a four month practicum for certification. If this were the case, the theoretical and pedagogical component would also occupy a period of less than six months which may not be long enough to develop the kind of attitudes and skills that are often used to separate a professional from a technician. Allen (1976) phrases it this way when he placed it at the top of his list of priorities for teacher education in Canada.

> Unless total time is increased, extra time in schools will reduce time on campus and consequently reduce the amount of course work that many professors and teachers consider essential. (p. 47)

These two forces, the aspirations to professional status and the emphasis on teacher competencies, have come together at a time when the necessity to produce large

numbers of teachers is no longer important. Therefore, there have been attempts to professionalize the teacher education program by extending the student teaching components in order to improve teacher competencies and more closely emulate the traditional professions. This trend toward longer actual teaching experience has been prevalent for several years and prompted Richards and Thiessen (1978) to note that:

> There has been a national trend towards longer periods of student teaching resulting in the so-called internship which may be up to sixteen weeks in length. The rationale for such a trend has been well documented and is accepted by almost all institutions. (p. 63)

The introduction of the Internship is a further attempt to meet the two critical criteria mentioned above. The term has a clear professional ring about it and helps to alleviate the time constraint notion that plagues the Canadian scene. It is clearly a concerted effort to tread a middle ground when the practicum is not adequate and an apprenticeship projects the wrong image.

Three Prior Studies

Following from the notions described above, research has been conducted at Memorial University during the past ten years to determine whether certain professional predispositions can be enhanced by lengthening the student teaching practicum. Measures of self concept and motivation have been taken during four different lengths of practica in three

different locations. The three prior studies conducted at Memorial have concentrated on the professional predispositions and have not considered the enhancement of technical expertise that may result from the lengthening of the practicum.

The study currently being undertaken will investigate the same professional predispositions with yet another varying length of practica, and will also examine the varying length of practica on the development of certain technical competencies. First year, inexperienced teachers have been surveyed to determine whether these successful candidates possess more positive professional predispositions than student teaching groups that were previously measured. While there has been a trend established among the responses recorded by the student teacher population previously surveyed, researchers will now attempt to determine whether these findings hold true for first year teachers.

In 1974 the first investigation at Memorial concerning the length of practicum and the professional predispositions of student teachers began. Two attitudes were considered, the development of self-concept as a student teacher and the motivation to become a good teacher. In this instance, the development of these attitudes was studied in an experimental program that featured an early exposure to the practical classroom situation. In essence, students entering their first year of a three year elementary teacher education program engaged in an experimental program that provided an integrated theory-practice relationship by providing an early

school experience combined with close cooperation between professors and practicing teachers. The experimental group developed a dynamic relationship between the practical school situation and the theoretical university setting and scored significantly higher on both of the attitudinal measures than the control group that had no in-school experience at all. It was proposed that either the extension of the practical school experience, the integration of the university-school relationship, or both, positively influenced the professional predispositions of the experimental student teaching group.

A second study was launched to further examine the influence of the lengthening of the practicum on the attitudes of student teachers. In 1974-75 there were two other experimental student teaching programs being implemented at Memorial. Both of these were called internships and involved a thirteen-week practicum. These internships were conducted in the city of St. John's and on a Memorial University campus in Harlow, England. Students were selected to participate in these internships where they spent four out of five days practice teaching in the schools under the supervision of a cooperating teacher and a member of the student teaching faculty. This experimental internship program provided roughly triple the time in the schools when compared to the regular program undertaken by about eighty percent of the student teachers. Internship teachers had more opportunities to teach entire units and participate in the teaching activities of the school. They also received much closer

supervision from the professors, and the cooperating teachers. The primary difference between the two internships was location, one being in Newfoundland and the other in England. These two experimental internships provided a good opportunity to examine the professional predispositions of student teachers who were participating in varying lengths of practica (three and thirteen weeks) at two different locations (England and Canada). The control group was composed of the vast majority of student teachers at Memorial who observe in the schools for one-half day per week during a thirteen week term and then spend a two week block in the schools to conclude their student teaching experience. Therefore, the interns have a practica of approximately fifty-two days and the regular student teachers practica consists of a sixteen day experience.

In this study three attitudinal variables were measured: self-concept as a student teacher, motivation towards teaching and attitudes towards teaching as a career. The results of the study generally indicated that the length of the student teaching program had no significant influence on the three measured attitudes of the student teachers. The only significant difference occurred in the measure of self-concept as a student teacher and that was not a result of the length of program but rather due to the location in England. It had been anticipated that the longer the period of practical experience would have enhanced the students self-concept and attitudes toward being a professional. Because there was no significant difference in these three professional

predispositions even though one group had a thirteen week experience and the other only a three-week practicum, the question of the appropriate length of student teaching became even more unclear.

In an effort to examine this topic further a third study was undertaken comparing the standard three-week practicum at Memorial with a thirteen-week extended practicum which is part of the twenty week student teaching program at Simon Fraser University. The same three attitudes were measured in a group of student teachers at Simon Fraser University and they were compared to the scores already referred to in the study above. Although there are many difficulties in comparing student teaching programs in different provinces an attempt was made to account for as many variables as possible. In comparing the two programs it was found that all three professional predispositions declined during the longer student teaching practica, however there was a significant effect only on the two motivational attitudes even though the self-concept was depressed. In viewing these results it is possible to argue that the longer practicum had a greater negative influence on a student teacher's motivation towards teaching and attitudes towards teaching as a career than the much shorter practicum at Memorial University. However, even though the longer student teaching practicum at Simon Fraser depressed the self-concept of the student teacher, the only significant negative effect on this variable occurred during the shorter

practicum at Memorial. Therefore, it might be argued that while the student teacher develops a better self-concept as a teacher in the longer program the predispositions towards teaching decline significantly.

While attempts have been made to explain why these unexpected findings have occurred, it is clear that further research into professional predispositions is necessary before the question of an optimum length of practicum can be established. A fourth study is underway which will attempt to measure yet another length of practica. A recent survey was undertaken to question all of the first year teachers that graduated in 1982-83 from the teacher education program. This survey is an attempt to question the successful graduates of the program about the adequacy of their preparation in terms of teaching techniques as well as their attitudes toward teaching. While the direct effect of the practicum will not be measured by this instrument, an interesting comparison can be made between first year teachers who had 1 week of student teaching and those who had a thirteen week internship experience. Because of a labor dispute last year the bulk of the graduating student teachers were unable to complete their two-week block experience and therefore began their teaching career with roughly one week of student teaching taken as one-half days during a ten-week period of the term. However, there were two experimental groups of interns who were able to take their normal thirteen week extended

practicum. Therefore one group had nearly ten times more practical experience in the schools than the much larger control group.

The questions included on the current survey are similar to those asked in the previous three studies, therefore questions about the professional predispositions of first-year teachers can be compared to those given by the teacher education graduates to determine whether those who are successful in obtaining employment feel differently about teaching as a career than the group as a whole. Comparisons can also be made between first-year teachers who have completed a thirteen-week student teaching practicum and those who have had a one-week student teaching experience.

When this research is completed there will be attitudinal measures on student teachers who have had one week, three weeks, six weeks, thirteen weeks and twenty weeks of student teaching experience. There will also be measures on the perceived technical competencies of first year teachers in many areas that can be compared to some of the longitudinal studies that are being conducted throughout Canada. It is the sincere hope of this author that cooperative studies can be conducted to investigate the influence of varying lengths of practica on the various competencies needed by teachers to successfully pursue a career in teaching.

Conclusions

The continuing research on professional predispositions being conducted by the research group at Memorial University casts doubt upon the notion that the longer the student teaching practicum the better. While it is not clear from the previous research what the optimum length of a practicum should be, it does appear that the governing factor might be the minimum time required to develop technical competence and self confidence rather than the period of time required to fully socialize a student into a teacher. Because the predispositions towards professional commitment seem to dwindle with time, the prolonged apprenticeship program with its emphasis on learning through experience seems to be inappropriate. Should an internship follow the traditional professional model when the practioner is fully certified and carefully socialized prior to the practical experience, perhaps the danger of more-of-the-same would be avoided. The practicum followed by the extended practicum verbally indicates the essence of this problem, however the early teaching experience has typically proven to be an effective de-selection mechanism. Therefore the extended practicum should come clearly into focus as the place where more-of-the-same should be eliminated. In the Canadian context where the one year professional certification program dominates the Secondary Education Program so completely the extended practicum must be viewed in terms of its ability to encourage career attitudes and values as well as technical

competencies. It might be that the commitment to teaching as a profession can better be instilled by a clearer understanding of the ethical and moral dimensions of the profession, rather than an extended field experience. Perhaps the reasons that student teachers tend to emulate their cooperating teachers is because they were unable to grasp the foundational aspects and pedagogical underpinnings of teaching in their one year of teacher education. There are many things that cannot be learned from practical experience especially when it is not possible to experience a wide variety of teaching situations and people are not inherently sensitive to differences in others.

There is little question that teachers need to have developed survival skills in their student teaching experience that will sustain them during the first year, but it is much more important that the professional attitudes and values that will encourage each individual to pursue a career in teaching be instilled in this program. The extended practicum, while it may be appropriately named in terms of its failure to meet internship standards, must not be more-of-the-same. Teacher education has taken on a huge socialization task, provided far too little time to accomplish this task and therefore needs to rethink the entire enterprise. Perhaps a recent article by Tymitz-Wolf (1984) summarizes this thought better.

> As teachers, as professionals, we want them to possess special skills, but also the attitudes and motivations which will let them participate fully in the learning experiences and professional development activities available to them throughout the course of their careers. Likewise, such preparation will enable them to generate more useful and interesting experiences for their own students in the years ahead. (p. 24)

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